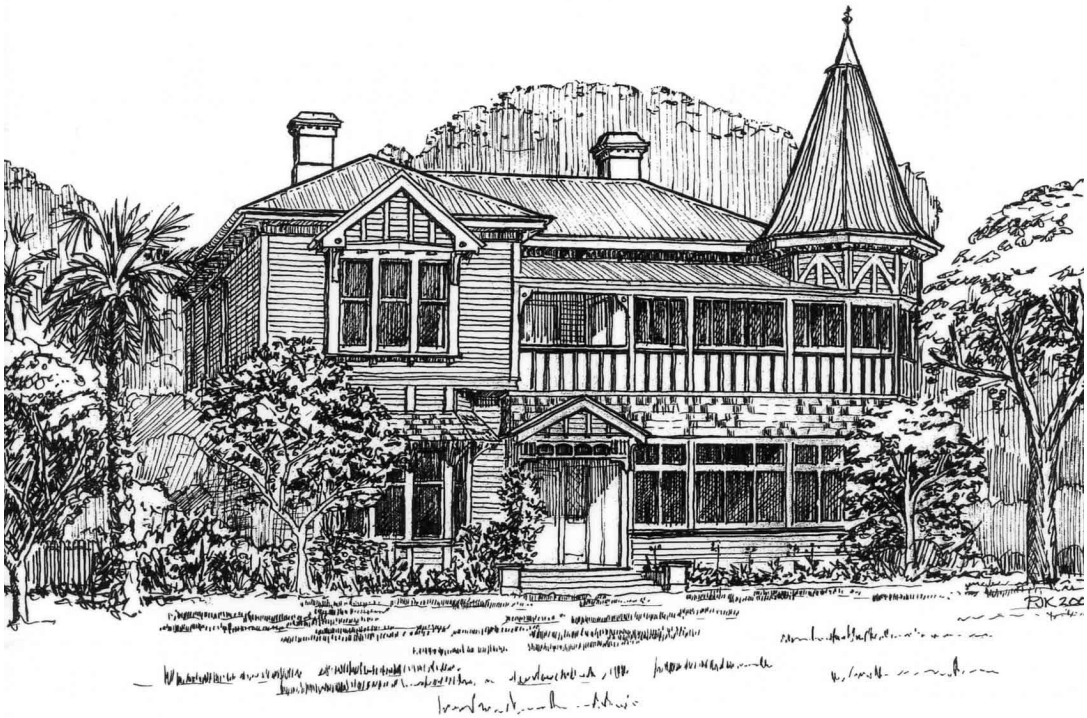


A House with a Story

# Avebury House



JAN MOODY

A House with a Story  
*Avebury House*

Jan Moody

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First published 2003

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ISBN 0-473-09643-9

Published by Avebury House Community Trust Inc.  
9 Eveleyn Couzins Avenue, Christchurch, New Zealand

Design and layout by Hazard Press Ltd  
Cover illustration by Philip Kennedy

Printed in Christchurch by Copyland

## **AVEBURY HOUSE — A HISTORY**

On a raised piece of sandy ground at 9 Eveleyn Couzins Avenue in Richmond stands a building with a story – Avebury House. The atmosphere and architecture of the old house encourage thoughts of its history and of those who have passed through its doors over time. The purpose of this booklet is to tell the fascinating story of Avebury House and garden from its beginnings to the present day.

## **RURAL SECTION 197**

Before European settlers occupied the land, the damp and swampy area, now known as Richmond, was used by the early Maori. The area was a rich and valuable source of mahinga kai for the Waitaha, Ngati Mamoe and Ngai Tahu people.

Prior to the arrival of the first of the Canterbury Association's colonists in 1850, the land in Christchurch was surveyed and divided into 50-acre rural sections and quarter-acre town sections. Richmond was originally known as Bingsland after Maurice Bing, an early settler in the area. He arrived in Christchurch in c1860, after spending eight years in Australia.

Avebury House now stands on what was originally Rural Section 197, which was first purchased in September 1851 by Dr John Seager Gundry, a surgeon from Wiltshire, England.

## **DR JOHN SEAGER GUNDRY**

Dr Gundry and his wife Isabella arrived in Lyttelton in 1851 on the ship *Steadfast*, one of a fleet of 25 ships chartered by the Canterbury Association. Dr Gundry was the ship's only surgeon and was responsible for the health and well-being of both the crew and passengers, many of whom were also from West England. Once he became settled in Christchurch, Gundry placed an

Dr John Seager Gundry.  
*Aotearoa New Zealand  
Centre, Christchurch City  
Libraries.*



advertisement in *The Lyttleton Times* on 2 August 1851, offering himself as a surgeon and *accoucheur* (male midwife).

Before purchasing RS 197 for £150, Gundry bought a section in Harewood Road, Papanui, in June 1851, which he named Avebury Farm in memory of his home in West England. When he moved from Harewood Road he took the name with him and renamed RS 197 'Avebury'. The cottage he built on this section forms part of Avebury House today. However there is no evidence that Dr Gundry ever lived on the site, and he is recorded as having spent time in Lyttelton during his time in Canterbury.

Gundry appeared to not think much of Christchurch, and described it as 'a town without form or comeliness' in his 1851 diaries'. In September 1858 he sold all his belongings and moved back to England. Through an estate agent, Gundry sold 25 acres of Avebury to William Flesher for £500 in 1871. Land prices in the area increased over the next ten years, and by 1882 the value of the property had increased to £1500.

## **WILLIAM FLESHER**

William Flesher, a shoemaker, travelled from Otely, Yorkshire to New Zealand on the *Amoor*, arriving in Lyttelton on 1 July 1864. Flesher continued to work as a shoemaker in Canterbury for some years, after which he worked in a succession of jobs. He was employed by *The Mail* newspaper, then by Mr J.L. Wilson, a corn merchant, by Mr W.H. Lane in a similar capacity and by Mr C.W. Turner as a grain buyer. Flesher retired from active business due to ill health, until 1884 when he opened a general commission agency in Cashel Street which he ran until just before his death.

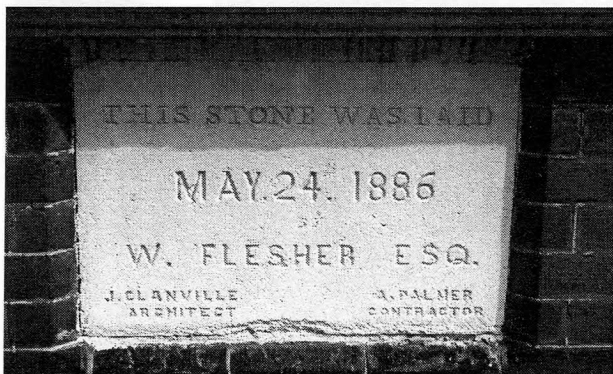
William took a great interest in, and played an

active part in, public matters and was described as 'a man of strong independent views.'<sup>2</sup> He was a member and Chairman of the Avon Road Board and is credited with contributing to the provision and widening of roads in Richmond. He even gifted a strip of land a quarter of a chain wide to the North Avon Road (one chain is equal to 20.12 metres).

William also took an active interest in educational matters and was Chairman of the Richmond School Committee from 1881 to 1884<sup>3</sup>. He helped to make it possible for the Richmond district to be separated from Christchurch East so that a school could be established in the Richmond area providing education for the local children.

William put himself forward several times as the representative for the Richmond district sector in Parliament, but was unsuccessful in the polls. He was a popular candidate for Stanmore Road in 1881 but was easily beaten when he stood for the Linwood seat in 1887.

He had strong religious beliefs and was one of the founders of Free Methodism in New Zealand. His church involvement began with a church in St Asaph Street and continued in the Richmond district when he moved there and became Secretary of the District Meeting, a position he held until the time of his death. William's involvement with the Richmond



The foundation stone of the Richmond Methodist Church Sunday School in Stanmore Road was laid by William Flesher in 1886.

*Photo supplied by Amanda Ross, Christchurch City Council Heritage.*

Methodist Church is evident by the fact that he laid the foundation stone of the Richmond Methodist Church Sunday School in Stanmore Road in 1886.

Although he had suffered nine years of ill health due to heart disease, William's death on 20 February 1889 was unexpected. He was travelling by the steamboat *Tarawera* from Melbourne back to New Zealand after a business holiday when he was found dead in his cabin on a stopover in Hobart. William was buried in the Avonside Holy Trinity Cemetery, along with his daughters and one son who predeceased him. He was survived by his wife Dorothy and son James.

## **THE FLESHER RESIDENCE – AVEBURY HOUSE**

Avebury House about five years after it was built.

*Dr P. Sheppard*

William died just four years after having built the Flesher family home – Avebury House. He commissioned Christchurch architect James Glanville to design a



home for him and his family in Richmond in c1885.

Glanville was born in Cornwell, England. He arrived in New Zealand in around 1871, entering Lyttelton on the ship *Zelandia*. He occupied property mainly in New Brighton and was referred to as being 'one of the pioneers of the seaside Borough.'<sup>4</sup> He took a very keen interest in civic matters and became the Mayor of New Brighton from 1908–1910. He also designed the Richmond Methodist Church Sunday School in Stanmore Road.

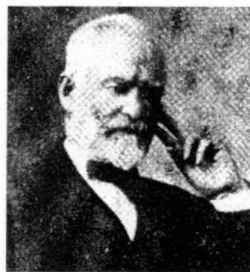
Glanville designed the large two-storey dwelling with a north-facing verandah on the ground floor, and a single-storey service wing at the rear, which incorporated the existing cottage on the site.

The simple grandeur, layout and many of the interior features of the house remain much the same as they were when the house was first built. A wide, lofty entrance hall led to the former drawing room and dining room. The kitchen, cloakrooms and pantry were located on the east side of the house and a nearby room on the west side was used as a nursery, den and breakfast room. The stairway with its finely crafted timber handrail led upstairs to the first floor, which housed three bedrooms, a bathroom and a lavatory as well as maids' quarters.

## JAMES FLESHER

James Flesher was William's eldest son. Like his father before him James was actively involved in public affairs and received an OBE in 1918 for his outstanding work in the community and the city. During his life he served on many trusts, and worked as both a barrister and solicitor, with offices at 9 Cathedral Square and later at 167 Hereford Street.

The people of New Brighton elected him Mayor of that district in 1912 and again from 1915–1917. He was a City Councillor in 1911 and from 1918 to 1920.



James Glanville.  
*Dr P Sheppard*

James Flesher.  
*Dr P. Sheppard*







Hubert de R Flesher.  
*Dr P Sheppard*

In 1921 he became Deputy Mayor of Christchurch, and in 1923–1925 was Mayor of Christchurch. In 1928 James was once more elected to the City Council and remained as a Councillor until his death in 1930.

James Flesher believed that it took “a certain class of citizen” who was “prosperous and knew how to deal with financial affairs” to be suitable for political life.<sup>5</sup> He was particularly skilled in matters of finance, and as a member of the City Council he was seen to be “a tireless guardian of the interests of the ratepayer”.<sup>6</sup>

James Flesher died at the age of 65, on 18 August 1930 and was survived by his wife, Margaret, and his son, Hubert de R Flesher and daughter Beryl. James is buried at the Avonside cemetery alongside his father.

Hubert, the only son of James Flesher, inherited Avebury and continued his father’s law firm J.A. Flesher & Son at 169 Hereford Street.

## MARGARET FLESHER



Margaret Deakin Flesher  
(wife of James Flesher).  
*Dr P. Sheppard*

James’ wife Margaret also played an active part in public affairs. Born in Adelaide, Margaret came to New Zealand as a girl and later worked as a teacher in a number of Christchurch schools. After marrying, and apart from her duties as Mayoress, she was a prominent member and one-time president of the Christchurch Women’s Club. She was also involved with the Red Cross, the St John Ambulance Association, the Cholmondeley Memorial Home and the Canterbury Pilgrims and Early Settlers’ Association.

## ALTERATIONS TO THE HOUSE

Around 1907 James commissioned Glanville to design alterations to the house. The appearance of the north façade of the house was radically changed to become larger, grander, and more decorative. A tower was added to the north west corner, the drawing room and

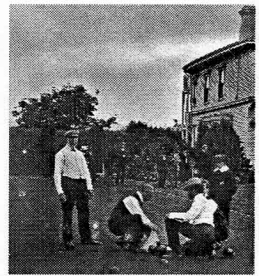


the master bedroom above were extended to the north and bay windows were added to both. An open balcony was created on the first floor and the main entrance on the ground floor was given emphasis with a decorative gable. The grand house and extensive grounds provided an ideal venue for garden parties.

## COUNCIL OWNERSHIP

In 1945 Hubert Flesher sold Avebury House and eight acres of land to the Crown. This was transferred to the Mayor, Councillors and Citizens of Christchurch for recreational purposes in 1951. Also during this time part of the land was allocated for State housing and road developments. The new street that was created at this time was named Eveleyn Couzins Avenue by Ernest Andrews, Mayor of Christchurch from 1941–1950, in memory of his recently deceased niece, who had acted as Mayoress of Christchurch from 1941 to 1945. Flesher Avenue which runs off Eveleyn Couzins Avenue was named after the Flesher family in acknowledgement of their contribution to the Richmond community.

After 1951, when ownership of the property was transferred to the City Council, the house was used for some years by the Plunket Society and by the gardeners



*Above: Garden party,  
February 1910.*

*Dr P. Sheppard*

*Above left: Circuit garden  
party, 1910.*

*Dr P. Sheppard*

of the park that surround it. In 1969 after the Plunket Society moved out, the rooms were converted into custodian's quarters.

## **ADAPTATION TO YOUTH HOSTEL**

In the 1960s the house was suffering from a lack of maintenance and in light of the expense of its upkeep, the Christchurch City Council considered options for the future of the house, which included demolition. This proved unnecessary when the Youth Hostel Association approached the Council with a view to leasing the building and using it for a hostel. The Council leased the house for a nominal rental to the Youth Hostel Association for five years with the option for renewal.

A number of internal alterations were needed to convert the house to a youth hostel. The verandahs were glazed in, ablution facilities were added, the service rooms behind the original drawing room were incorporated into a large communal kitchen and the tower room on the ground floor was incorporated into a matron's flat. The hostel had the first resident warden in New Zealand, Mrs Vi Burt. Upstairs, one of the bedrooms was divided and the bathroom and maid's room combined to make a bedroom.

In addition the roof had to be repaired, the exterior painted, a fire alarm and fire fighting systems installed and the whole house furnished. The cost was estimated to be at least £3500. More than 2,932 hours were spent on refurbishment work in order to upgrade the house to meet Youth Hostel Association standards, with much of the work being carried out by voluntary labour. It was over a year before the house was officially opened as the Cora Wilding Youth Hostel on 3 December 1966.

In 1987 the Youth Hostel Association again undertook extensive maintenance work on the house, particularly to the exterior. Their lease ran out

ten years later and the hostel closed on 14 June 1997 as it was no longer suitable for their purposes.

## **ADAPTATION TO COMMUNITY USE**

Once again the threat of demolition stood over the house. In 1999 a group of Christchurch City Councillors called for the house to be demolished because its restoration would be too costly. The future of the house was uncertain but intervention by the Richmond Community, the Hagley-Ferrymead Community Board and a number of City Councillors encouraged its reuse as a community facility.

The refurbishment and conservation of Avebury House was a long and costly process and a challenge which Richmond residents eagerly took on.

Work on the project was begun in 1999 when the Christchurch City Council Projects and Property Committee approved a \$365,000 grant for the restoration and refurbishment of Avebury House which was to be spent over a period of three years as follows:

1999/2000.....	\$115,000.00
2000/2001.....	\$150,000.00
2001/2002.....	\$100,000.00

Because the final use of the house had not been identified, the Hagley/Ferrymead Advocacy Team commissioned a community consultation to be done in September–December 2001.

Through public meetings and public tours of the old house, the people of Richmond were able to express their ideas for its use. Enthusiasm was high and as a result the Avebury House Community Trust was formed in December 2001, comprising:

Beth Rouse – Chair  
Andrea Grieve

Brenda Hewson  
Archie Kennedy

Gordon Prince  
Quentin Wilson  
Helen Hodkin joined in January 2003

Phill Hoare  
Anneke de Leur

The Trust now administers Avebury House on behalf of the community.

Working with the local community, Malcolm Kitt, architectural designer for the Christchurch City Council and the project co-ordinator, identified the conservation work required and designed alterations needed to adapt the house for its new use. Fully experienced and qualified technicians carried out all of the work, which included the following:

- A new fire report identified the need for the installation of an interior automatic sprinkler system and the removal of old fire escapes which did not meet current fire safety regulations.
- Repair of the exterior timber work.
- Exterior repainting with a new colour scheme compatible with the age of the house.
- A wheelchair ramp was built on the west side of the house to provide disabled access.
- Outside security lights were installed as an extra safety requirement.
- The roof was replaced.
- A solar power system manufactured in Christchurch for heating water was installed on the north side of the roof in order to receive all-day sun. The solar panels are carefully placed so as not to intrude on the heritage values of the house.
- A piece of concrete capping missing from the wide front step was replaced in order to maintain the grand entrance to the house.
- Interior decorating was carried out with a new paint scheme that complemented the character of the house.

- The old youth hostel fittings which intruded on the heritage values of the house were removed.
- The house was totally rewired in order to meet current electrical safety codes. The installation included new switchboards, new cables for computers, phones and fax machines to meet the requirements of the community centre.
- The old hostel ablution blocks located to the rear of the house in the original cottage were totally refurbished to provide new toilets, including a unisex disabled toilet and a parenting room.
- The old youth hostel kitchen was removed and refurbished with high quality new equipment to create a commercial kitchen big enough to cook meals for conferences and small groups.
- The wooden floors were stripped back and hardwaxed – a method similar to using polyurethane, but more environmentally friendly, with its low level of solvents. The result is a hardwearing floor with a natural shine which is easy to clean.
- The old hostel carpet and vinyl were pulled up and replaced.
- The timber skirting boards, architraves, mouldings and picture rails were either repaired or replaced where necessary. Repairs were matched exactly to the original existing heritage fabric profiles or in some cases left the way they were in accordance with current heritage conservation practices.

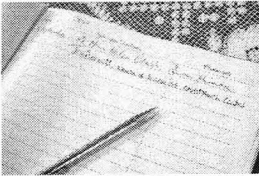
Although Avebury House has seen a number of alterations over the years in response to its changing uses, the original architectural form, and many aspects of the original layout and decorative elements, remain intact.

Avebury House is a building which has stood the test of time and accommodated a number of people over a



Local school pupils provide entertainment at the Gala Opening.

*Penny Griffith*

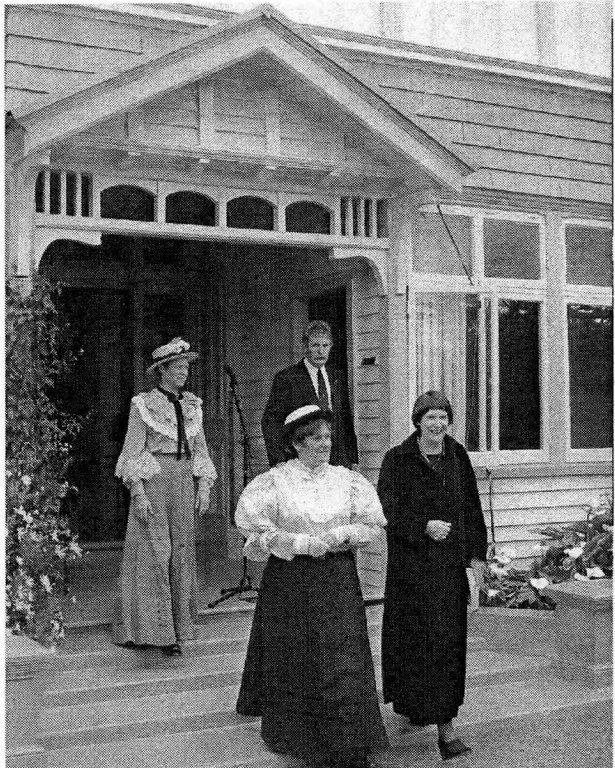


*Right:* Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Helen Clark with Lesley McMillan (left) and Trust Chair Beth Rouse (rear) following a tour of the house at the Gala Opening, 18 September 2002.

*Penny Griffith*

period of 118 years who have traversed the old stairway and enjoyed the view from the balcony, just as the Prime Minister Helen Clark did on 18 September 2002 when she officially re-opened Avebury House as a community facility. Guests dressed in costume from the Victorian and Edwardian eras and local school groups provided the musical entertainment and catering for the afternoon tea on the lawn. At 3pm the Prime Minister cut the ribbon across the front door (which equals a door and a half of our common front doors today), and was then taken on a tour of the house.

It was a day of success for the Richmond community, who made sure their need for a focal point and meeting place for their community was heard by Christchurch City Council. The local community followed through with their commitment to establishing a community







Entertainment at the Gala  
Opening.

*Penny Griffith*

venue in Avebury House and as well as working alongside the Council during the refurbishment, continue to support the house with their patronage.

## **AVEBURY HOUSE FACILITIES**

The ground floor of the house has wheelchair access and a large reception/meeting room (accommodating 30 to 40 people). A large commercial-grade kitchen and laundry, a toilet block with parenting room, and a medium-sized room with hand basin (suitable for art and craft or children's activities) are available for community use.

On the first floor is one large reception/meeting room, three smaller rooms, one medium-sized room with data outlets for seven computers, and a storeroom and office.



Avebury can supply trestle tables of different sizes, chairs, tablecloths, whiteboards and crockery for up to 60 people. There is no resident caterer, however there is a list of caterers on call. The cost is determined by individual requirements. For further information please contact:

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Avebury House  
9 Eveleyn Couzins Ave  
Richmond  
Christchurch  
Ph 942-5615

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the people listed below, as well as all those who have in some way helped with the production of this booklet:

Avebury House Community Trust

Marion Rickerby	Philip Kennedy
Lesley McMillan	Janet Cowan
Canterbury Museum	Beth Garvey
Dr Peter Sheppard	Sarah Helleur
Amanda Ross	Jenny May

Christchurch City Council Heritage files

Aotearoa New Zealand Centre, Christchurch City Libraries

Hazard Press Ltd

#### **ENDNOTES**

1. Dr Gundry's diaries, 1851
2. *G.R. MacDonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biographies*, Canterbury Museum
3. Richmond School 1875–1925 Jubilee Souvenir
4. *The Press* 20.8.1913
5. *A New History of Canterbury*, Steven Eldred-Grigg, p.136
6. *The Press* 19.8.1930

**O**n a raised piece of sandy ground at 9 Eveleyn Couzins Avenue in Richmond stands a building with a story – Avebury House. The atmosphere and architecture of the old house encourage thoughts of its history and of those who have passed through its doors over time. The purpose of this booklet is to tell the fascinating story of Avebury House and garden from its beginnings to the present day.

**JAN MOODY** has always had a keen interest in local history, helping to research both the Linwood Community Arts Centre and the Linwood Cemetery. She was studying history at the University of Canterbury when she began working at Avebury House, where she soon became involved in researching the history of the property. When the Avebury House Community Trust decided to have a booklet written, Jan was the obvious choice of author. She has previously had published a book of poetry.

Cover illustration by Philip Kennedy



Avebury House Community Trust Inc.